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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY 0840  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/THE WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUMIAAA/USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 TEGUCIGALPA 001072

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [EFIN](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: ALL SET FOR THE KEY HONDURAN PRIMARY ELECTIONS

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 1064

[1](#)B. TEGUCIGALPA 1034

[1](#)C. AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reason 1.4 (b & d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The primary elections of November 30 are a critical event in Honduras. Our Mission had been intimately involved with supporting democracy and the primary election process in Honduras for months. We have worked through our Democracy Working Group, in conjunction with the Group of 16 donor nations and organizations (G-16) and the Organization of American States (OAS) to shore up the process. At the request of the OAS, we have committed staff from the Embassy community to serve as international observers and we will host a control room in the Embassy to report results to Washington. The Elections Tribunal Magistrates gave its final readout on the electoral panorama today, and they believe that they have put in place the most modern and transparent system possible. All parties agree that it is the best system Honduras has ever had. The threat of a teacher's strike has ended and the Ministers of Defense and Education have made all the right positive statements. The OAS Head of the International Observer Mission, Raul Alconada met with the Ambassador to discuss the political situation and to review the observation mission. Alconada conveyed concern about President Zelaya, behind the scenes political machinations that seemed to undermine the electoral process. The Ambassador stressed that successful primaries would serve as a stabilizing element in the political equation. Looking to the actual primaries, it appears that within the National Party Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo seems destined to win with a substantial margin, but within the Liberal Party, the results are too close to call. End Summary.

Embassy Tegucigalpa Works to Support Democracy

[1](#)2. (C) Embassy Tegucigalpa has worked diligently over the past months to support the Honduran primary election process. The Embassy has an active Democracy Working Group that brings together several offices and agencies. This group has met throughout the year and in the lead-up to the elections went to weekly coordination meetings. Through our USAID mission we have supported the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and their mission to organize a system of national

observers. USAID has also given technical support to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), focused on their rapid transmission of results system (TREP). The Embassy team has worked with the Group of 16 donor nations and organizations (G-16), particularly with the UN Development Program mission, by participating fully in the working group on democracy and elections, which has supported the National Register of Persons in issuing electoral credentials, and also supporting the work of the TSE. In addition, the Embassy has worked very closely throughout the process with the Organization of American States (OAS), which is in charge of an international observer mission. The OAS has brought in 30 international observers from around the world, and the Embassy has offered ten members of the Embassy community to bolster this team. Embassy observers underwent the official OAS training and will be sent to three departments to serve as official representatives of the OAS. Local media put great faith in the international observer mission, and most Hondurans generally agree that it will help deter fraud at the polling stations. The Embassy will also host a control room in the mission that will be open the entire day to report results to Washington.

#### TSE Gives Its Final Read-Out

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13. (C) The Ambassador attended a breakfast on November 28 offered by the TSE so that they could give the G-16 their frank appraisal of the situation immediately prior to the elections. The TSE magistrates believe they have put in

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place the most transparent system they could, and all international observers agree that despite its faults, it is the best system that has ever been utilized in Honduras. The TSE announced that it expects to deliver preliminary results in the presidential races a few hours after the polls close, as the presidential ballots are far less complicated than those for members of Congress or local councils and mayorships. This early announcement is contingent on the TREP system functioning without major problems. Because 4,000 TREP officers will be reporting to only 200 operators at the TSE's collection center, there could be the possibility of problems, but the TSE informed the group that the early tests had gone well.

14. (C) Originally, the TSE had attempted to contract with a local company to laminate the vote results (called "actas"), but the company that they had worked with discovered that their process could very easily smudge the actas themselves, so the TSE decided not to contract them for this service. In response to the raised expectations, some candidates were complaining that the actas would now be easier to alter, but the TSE pointed out that no country in the world laminates their vote results before sending them to a central authority, and that this added precaution was not necessary to ensure accurate results and evade fraud.

#### What's Happening on the Local Scene?

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15. (C) On the local scene, the teachers who had threatened to takeover schools and not allow voters to enter the polling stations came to an agreement with the Ministry of Education.

President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya told the Ambassador on November 21 that the teachers were "his problem" and that he would "take care" of it prior to the elections. In support of this positive message, Minister of Defense Aristides Mejia came out strongly on November 25 and 26 with statements to the effect that the blocking of a polling station was considered to be an attempt against Honduras' democracy and any violators would be arrested and subject to sentences of 3 - 10 years. In addition, Minister of Education Marlon Breve also made statements that any teachers who participated would be punished. The Ambassador personally called both Mejia and Breve on November 28 to express his appreciation for their

positive messages.

Message from OAS  
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¶16. (C) Alconada met with the Ambassador to discuss elections concerns and seek USG support on November 28. He raised his concerns over President Zelaya's call for a constituent assembly and other rumors that he might plan to try and extend his term. The Ambassador said that it was our belief that the electoral process was a critically important element in reaffirming the Honduran people's support for their democratic process and would serve as a stabilizing element in the political equation. The Ambassador expressed the hope that the Honduran people's exercising of their political right to vote would transcend political maneuvering by Zelaya and other political actors. The Ambassador mentioned that President Zelaya in private and in several public statements had given assurances that he was not interested in staying beyond his term in office. He had also been helpful in resolving the teacher threats to take over the schools and prevent voters from voting.

¶17. (C) In the discussion, the Ambassador also stressed the support for the elections given by the Honduran military and the major political parties and that while flawed, the electoral mechanism was arguably the most transparent ever for put together for Honduran primaries. Both Alconada and the Ambassador shared the concern that the closer the results the more likely someone would cry foul. Both agreed to meet on Election Day and to stay in close touch in those following.

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Comment  
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¶18. (C) Things are as organized as they can be, and Honduras has the best system in place than it ever has. This does not mean that there will not be irregularities or allegations of fraud, or other problems during and following the voting. In the National Party, Lobo has a comfortable lead, with some reliable polls showing him with 75 percent of the National Party votes. The race within the Liberal Party is much more contentious and tight. Reliable polling suggests that Santos/Mauricio Villeda will win in some departments, Micheletti will win in others, and Eduardo Maldonado will take Tegucigalpa and possibly even Colon and Atlantida. (Note: Reftel B and previous report on Santos' removal from the ballot and replacement by substitute Villeda. End note.) Maldonado's unexpected strength makes the race between Santos and Micheletti even tighter than expected. According to these polls, the race is still too close to call, although other polling shows that Santos, proxy, Mauricio Villeda, may be ahead by as much as 15 points.

¶19. (S) Rumors continue on possible attempts by Zelaya to continue his term. Most center on his and his supporters call for a constituent assembly, leading to fears that he would use such an assembly to extend his term. However, Zelaya told the Ambassador (Reftel A) that he would only seek to change the constitution to allow presidents to seek reelection after his term. It would be near impossible for Zelaya to arrange for a constituent assembly to extend his term after his successor had been elected. Nevertheless, we expect Zelaya to continue to maneuver in order to keep himself at the center of events as long as possible.  
LLORENS